

Shivaratri Brings in the Devout in Large Numbers

BY S. BALASUBRAMANIAN

Under the guidance of Swami Ishwarananda, Chinmaya Mission celebrated Shivaratri in grand style at Rameshwaram on Sunday, March 10. As part of Shivaratri, Sahasranama Archana was performed by parents and teachers of Bal Vihar in three sessions. The first session on March 9 was led by Venugopal, and the other two on March 10, by Ravi Vishnubotla. Over 200 parents and teachers participated.

On Shivaratri day, the main puja in the morning was conducted by Pandit Sivaramakrishnan. Along with 11 ritviks, he conducted the Ekadasa Rudra Japa, while Acharya Mahadevanji performed Rudra Abhisheka. Rudra Homa concluded the morning activities.

The evening program included Dharmabhishekam, where everyone got the opportunity to perform Abhisheka to Lord Shiva. This was followed, for the first time, by the Shata Deepa Alankara to Lord Shiva. 108 Chinmaya lamps brought in by devotees were lit by them one by one at the altar creating a beautiful visual. The Rudra Abhisheka was performed by Balasubramanian.

The final Mahamangala Arati was performed at midnight.

Apart from the pujas, music and dance offerings were also made to the Lord. Students of the Shakti School of Bharata Natyam, under the guidance of Guru Viji Prakash offered ‘Shivanjali,’ and Chinmaya Shruti and Swaranjali members rendered bhajans in praise of Lord Shiva.



Pt. Chakrabarty Displays Musical Mastery at Chinmaya Mission



“Painting pictures with breath through music,” is what Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty declared it to be, at the top of the concert he readied to deliver on Mar.24 at Chinmaya Rameshwaram where he spellbound a packed hall of 450 music lovers with evocative vocal renderings.

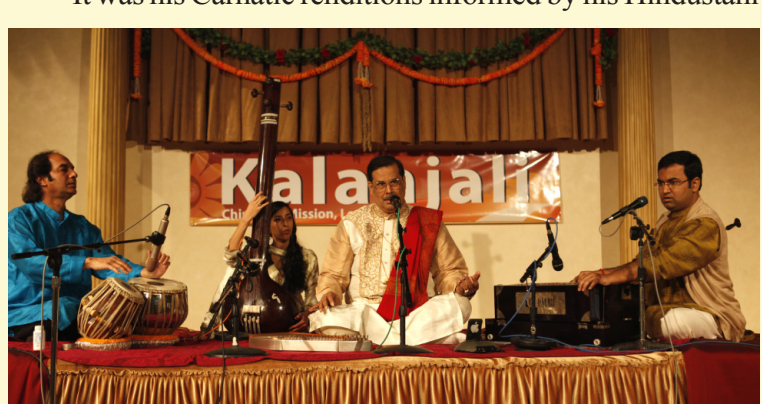
When he sang, “koyaliya kook sunaye,” the bird’s call was heard; trees seemed to spring with life with, “phooli basant bahar,” and when the singer used Kabir’s words, “na mandir mein, na masjid mein,” the muezzin seemed to make the call to prayer.

Chakrabarty, a student of many masters across disciplines and genres, also regaled the audience with his felicity with the different gharanas of Hindustani music. In 12 and 16 beat cycles, the vocalist sang the less popular raag, lalit pancham, and brought quickly to the notice of all, for instance, the long and sustained pitches of the Kirana style and given that he was singing in teen taal, the Jaipur gharana which makes heavy use of it. Indeed, intermittently through the concert, he broke into sections a composition with each informing the listeners of something new.

Chakrabarty sang the ever touching doha of Kabir, “moko kahan dundhera bande mein to tere paas mein.” With the performer’s subtleness of tone and delivery, the composition once again infused reverence and submission in the hearts and minds of the listener. The singer was also effective in the bhajan ‘Hari Om Tat Sat,’ a favorite of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and in the opening slokas where he paid homage to Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Maa Sharada.

The thumri ‘prem agan jiyara’ sung by Chakrabarty in his richly textured voice, was in khamaj, often considered by many as the flirtatious raag. The song, again made famous by Bade Ghulam Ali Khan was appropriately full of shringar ras. His other pieces included a geet and a Bengali one in raag pili.

It was his Carnatic renditions informed by his Hindustani



avocation that had the crowd tapping along. The kuntalavarali thillana of Dr. Balamuralikrishna has been an audience favorite lighting up umpteen music and dance performances and Chakrabarty did the same. With “vatapi ganapatim” he juxtaposed the two traditions of Hindustani and Carnatic pointing it out with different swars, but effectively matched.

Chakrabarty was accompanied by the famed Pandit Arup Chattopadhyay on the tabla. In his solo rendition, with his fingers flying and pure enunciation of every beat, he drew huge applause from the gathering. Through the concert, his accompaniment was at its classical best – never distracting from the vocalist. Brajeshwar Mukherjee on harmonium and Chakrabarty’s student was praised lavishly by his guru and did not disappoint. Tampura accompaniment



was by the young Indian-American Ritika Dutta.

The event was organized by Kalanjali, the cultural wing of Chinmaya Mission Los Angeles which aims to bring quality programs to the Southland and is open to all members of the community. In attendance was Swami Ishwarananda, head acharya of the mission, and the inspiration behind Kalanjali, who has aimed ever since the Rameshwaram center opened three years ago, to reach out to the community and establish meaningful dialog with like minded organizations.

Also at the concert was Swami Sarvadevananda of Ramakrishna Mission and leading musicians of Southern California who at the conclusion honored Chakrabarty and his accompanists with flowers and books. The evening was emceed by CMLA member and one of Kalanjali’s Directors Raj Mantha.

Hikers Thrill in Going Up Santiago Peak

Saturday, March 16 brought excitement and nervousness all rolled into one for the 43 members of CMLA who had signed on to hike up Santiago peak along the Holy Jim Trail. It was to be an all day round trip journey to the top at 5,700 feet and a 14 mile long walk.

Essentially meant for yatisr who will travel to the holy Manasarovar and Kailash this summer, it was open to all who wished to join.

By 6am Rameshwaram’s main hall was filled with chatter, backpacks, water bottles, trekking poles and sun hats. A group picture and an hour or so later, the group was at the trailhead and in prayer, led by Swami Ishwarananda. Setting out in a great spirit of camaraderie, the hikers picked one of three distances to cover nicely dubbed as laghu (6miles), maha (9miles) and purna (14 miles).

People chatted, made new friends, shared snacks, listened on headphones to music, took pictures...and with the midday sun beating down on the tree barren mountain top, eagerly scooped up the small patches of now melting frozen snow to cool themselves down with.

At the conclusion, everyone was in agreement: it was brutal and tiring but it was also deeply satisfying and to know that the body and mind had been pushed and triumphed!

Hikers also extended their thanks to Ravi Vishnubhotla and team who had meticulously charted out the challenging hike, arranged for SUVs, designated drivers and provided detailed instructions, especially for the less initiated, to ready themselves to go up Santiago Peak.

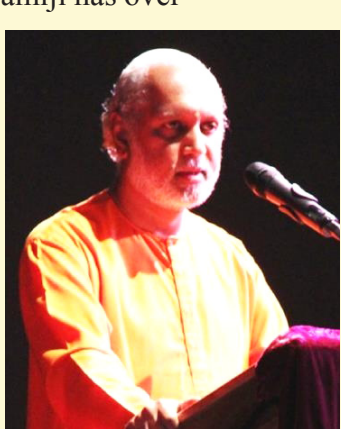


Valmiki Ramayan – Devotees Listen on With Interest

Swamiji’s monthly talks on the Valmiki Ramayan continued in March with him dwelling largely on the aspects of soundarya, the qualities of a devotee and glimpses into the characters of King Dasharatha and Janaka.

The text, said Swamiji has over 300 verses on shringara and the qualities enumerated here, were all to be found in the form of Lord Rama. Quoting in addition from the works of the poet-king Brathrahari, some of the qualities that he spoke of included that of the hand whose best quality was its ability to serve and help; the beauty of the mouth lies in its steady ability to speak the truth; the shoulder in its strength; the heart’s in the purity of thought; and the ears to listen and learn so judgment is never impaired.

While describing the beauty of the head to be that of humility to bow down to the guru, Swamiji narrated the story of how Gurudev Pujya Swami Chinmayananda was once to receive a



blind mahatma in Mumbai and when they entered the hall, the unknowing sevaks had placed two seats next to each other. Gurudev, irrespective of his own station in life, immediately asked that his seat be removed, stating instead that his own place was at the feet of the mahatma.

Cultivating these desirable qualities in us along with love for the lord, can only gain us eternal happiness.

Swamiji concluded the week long satsang on the final day with the sweet bhajan, “jaya jaya jaya raghava janaki vallabha.”

From Swamiji:

“You never tire of looking at the Lord, like you would at other things, because He represents you. And we of course love ourselves.”

“With right knowledge you increase humility. With love that humility increases even more.”

Happy Birthday!



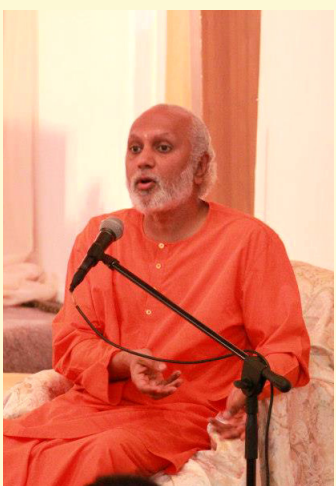
CMLA’s own beloved Acharya Mahadevi, turned 70 this month. Members and friends greeted him on the occasion. A favorite with little children, Mahadevi responded to all wishes in his inimitable cheerful way! Swamiji in his greeting said: There are those who inherit greatness and some leave, only few live in greatness... one among those is our dear Mahadevanji. His inexhaustible energy to serve his Master is contagious and I am one of those lucky one who got influenced by him! My ardent and loving wishes for his healthy, long life!

Chinmaya Mission Talk Held at ICC in Simi Valley

The new Radha Bihari temple at the Indian Community Centre here, was the scene of beautiful bhajans and satsang by Swami Ishwarananda of Chinmaya Mission Los Angeles on the evening of March 19.

Swamiji spoke of love as a universal language that was embodied by Lord Krishna. In keeping with the jnana yoga stream, represented by Chinmaya Mission, he dwelt on the vedantic interpretations on the life and stories that revolved around the incarnation of Lord Krishna.

The event was organized by the Northridge and Simi Valley chapters of the Mission which holds its Sunday Balavihar classes at ICC. Madhu Sharma, the Co-prasadar of the chapters thanked Naridnarnath Shashtri of the temple and all present. The event concluded with arati and mahaprasadar.



CMLA Students Have a Summer Option....

Chinmaya Naada Bindu will have a Monsoon Dance and Music Intensive, a 3-week Residential Bharatanatyam immersion workshop in the spiritual serenity of a Gurukul during the spectacular monsoons in India.

From July 12 to August 1, students who meet the eligibility criteria are invited to steep themselves in the art forms along with yoga, cultural tours, vedic chanting and a study of theory, among others.

For more information: www.chinmayanaadabindu.org

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